

Enemies becoming Friends!?
German-Russian Consultations as an Instrument
for a Reliable Partnership

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin by taking a look at Germany's and Russia's interests in forging as close a partnership as possible. I will then say something about the special historical relations between our two countries before moving on to outline the breadth and depth of present-day cooperation.

I.

Let me begin with our interests.

Germany has an interest in having Russia as a modern, internally stable, strong and economically prosperous partner. Russia is strategically important to us - Germans and Europeans - by virtue of its location and size, its political and military importance, its wealth of energy resources and its economic potential. A stable and prosperous future in Europe can only be achieved if we work with, not against Russia, particularly in view of the broad spectrum of mutual dependencies which bind us together. This applies to the energy sector and also to economic and technological cooperation. Close cooperation is vital in relation to international conflicts if we want to succeed as partners for peace, security and stability. And this is also true when it comes to tackling such global challenges as terrorism and climate protection.

It also applies to the challenges arising from the emerging economies such as China, Brazil and India. In terms of demographic development and also economic performance the European Union and Russia, too, will lose something of their power and influence relative to the emerging countries and regions of the world. Everything therefore points to the need for the countries of Europe - and that includes Russia - to look to each other more than before in the 21st century. The EU needs Russia - and Russia needs the EU. I see no possibility of any so-called "third way".

II.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Relations between Germany and Russia are built on a long shared history which has encompassed both close and fruitful exchange and also the most profound catastrophes.

The Russian Empire first turned its attention to the West under Peter the Great. Catherine the Great continued on this course. Nearly 30,000 people from Germany accepted her invitation to "*all foreigners to come into Our Empire*". By 1914 the number of German immigrants had risen to 700,000, most of them settling along the Volga. Catherine may have been the best-known German to have ascended the Russian throne, but the relations between the Tsar's court and Germany's dynasties had a centuries-old tradition. By the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century German influence on Russian intellectual life was increasing considerably, displacing French culture which had held sway until then. Dostoyevsky took Friedrich Schiller and E.T.A. Hoffmann as his role models while Ivan Turgenev was deeply influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer. Academia was dominated by German scholarship. Russian painters, including Kandinsky, had a major influence on art in Germany. There is a particularly powerful cultural attraction between Germans and Russians, which explains why Berlin became a centre of Russian culture in the 1920s.

The greatest catastrophe to befall our relationship played out when National Socialist Germany attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. This dark chapter in our relations was consigned to history two decades ago. For Germany the fall of the Wall and reunification constituted the second great watershed of the past century - after 8 May 1945 which was our zero hour. In this case an unreservedly happy watershed which marked the beginning of a new era in relations with Russia.

The special importance of the German-Russian relationship lies in precisely this diversity and breadth of political, cultural and human relations which is unique in Europe. This is combined with a profound interest which, while at times based on deep-rooted stereotypes and images of each other which fluctuate between fascination and foreignness, nevertheless continues today to incorporate a deep and firmly-established mutual commitment. This intensity and diversity is thus one of the defining features of the German-Russian relationship. The other is that the relationship is always informed by Russia's struggle for its position vis-à-vis the "West" and "Europe".

III.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Any German policy on Russia must be based on two pillars, the first of which must be a credible and dependable Europe policy. This means that Germany's Russia policy must be anchored in EU policy. The second vital pillar is dependable and trusting relations with America. Whenever a German government has questioned or wanted to change these two pillars, it has damaged Germany and Europe. Experience has shown that the more trusting are our relations with our EU partners and also with our transatlantic partners, the greater is the scope and room for manoeuvre in German-Russian relations. This is why we are always at pains to make our Russia policy transparent vis-à-vis third parties. Today German-Russian

relations are less than ever a "special relationship". Quite the reverse. They are firmly anchored in European-Russian relations and reflect the complexity of Russia's fluctuating relations with "Europe" as a whole. It is important to say, however, that we on the EU and NATO side must be united on two strategic questions and take action accordingly: what do we in the EU and NATO want *with* Russia and what do we want *from* Russia? Only if they have a common Russia policy will the EU and NATO be a respected and powerful partner of Russia.

IV.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In recent years Germany and Russia have steadily stepped up their cooperation.

This is reflected in numerical terms in our trade relations. Germany is one of Russia's most important trading partners. In the energy sector Russia is Germany's number one supplier. And Germany supplies huge volumes of machinery, equipment, motor vehicles and plant to Russia. While trade slumped in the 2009 crisis, it is now increasing again with two-digit growth rates.

Russia is a particularly important partner for Germany in other areas, too. Cooperation between Russia and Germany is strategically important with respect to a large number of international and global issues. These include cooperation with NATO, particularly with reference to Afghanistan, the fight against international terrorism and drug crime. The annual German-Russian intergovernmental consultations, which involve virtually the entire cabinet, are a clear sign of the special importance our governments attach to their mutual relations.

We do not see German-Russian cooperation as a mere partnership of convenience limited only to economics or energy. The dialogue between our civil societies is very important to us. We are guided by our belief that the relationship between our countries - particularly in difficult times - will be all the more stable and enduring, the broader and deeper are the personal contacts and ties between people across all levels.

The role of the German-Russian Coordinator for Intersocietal Cooperation, which I have held for five years, is attached to the German Foreign Ministry. This fact reflects the importance the Federal Government attaches to intersocietal cooperation. But let me say clearly, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, that it is not my job as coordinator to impose cooperation on German and Russian civil societies and NGOs from the top down. No, my role is to put committed people, useful initiatives and concrete fields of cooperation in touch with each other, to provide support and to establish networks between them. The starting point therefore is a concrete interest in cooperating with the other side on the part of civil society. If it is a matter of helping this cooperation along or, as we say today, networking, then I am the person to talk to.

One very recent example of this was the collaboration to establish a voluntary fire service in Russia. After the devastating forest fires last year President Medvedev approached Federal Chancellor Merkel asking for assistance to set up a voluntary fire service in Russia modelled on the German system. Gauging the general mood at that time, I believed the Russian people were more than willing to support future fire control measures. In order to exploit this

dynamism, and working with the Russian Ministry of Civil Defence, Emergencies and Disaster Relief, I set in motion cooperation to establish local voluntary fire services. The project builds on the structures of the German-Russian town twinning arrangements and is supported by companies which produce fire control equipment - a particularly illuminating example of how political, economic and social interests can be brought together for mutual benefit.

Since the establishment of the German-Russian Youth Exchange in 2006 this foundation provides funding for more than 10,000 school students and young people in exchange programs between Germany and Russia every year. This has since developed into a very substantial pillar of German-Russian exchange. Every young Russian who spends time in Germany and every young German who spends time in Russia carries the hope of ever closer partnership.

We need therefore to promote the process of German-Russian exchange. Exchange is a broad field. It includes not only school exchange programs but also academic exchange: every year around 5,500 students from Germany and Russia take part in programs funded by the German Academic Exchange Service. There are around 90 twinning arrangements between towns in Germany and Russia, some of which have existed since the 1950s. There are voluntary organisations working in Russia in social projects. And the number of associations and citizens action groups in Germany devoted to exchange and encounters in Russia runs into the hundreds.

One important instrument is the Petersburg Dialogue, which was established 10 years ago with the aim of creating networks between the civil societies of Germany and Russia. Already it has generated a series of projects in various areas, set up with the aid of Russian and German experts, academics, representatives of civil society and business leaders working in collaboration: these include projects on the rule of law and law enforcement, health policy, economic policy and energy policy. The Petersburg Dialogue enjoys the patronage of the serving Federal German Chancellor and the Russian President. The last meeting was held in July on the subject of "*Citizens, Society and the State - Partnership for Modernisation*" - very much in the spirit of the interest in a modern Russia I mentioned at the outset.

In July of last year a suggestion was made at the Petersburg Dialogue to collaborate on the production of a German-Russian history book. This is an extremely ambitious project requiring an intensive process of learning and rethinking on both sides. The question of designing a shared school textbook involves far more, after all, than agreeing the content. It is also a matter of the way in which we each view and understand our relations. The institutional framework of the Petersburg Dialogue is particularly helpful for such an interculturally challenging and politically sensitive project.

V.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This broad cooperation between our civil societies is in line with the interest we all have in a modern Russia. It is not for the Germans to tell the Russian side what they should do and what policy would be best for them. But I firmly believe that some rules apply in all countries and at all times which could contribute to the success of Russian modernisation efforts. President Medvedev leaves no doubt that the key to Russia's future lies in its internal development. And he stresses the role of civil society in the

country's modernisation. In order to tackle its internal problems Russia needs the active participation of its society; it also needs a genuine separation of powers, free media and people who engage "from the bottom up". Innovation, creativity and engagement cannot be imposed from above. In order to fully exploit the potential of the highly flexible and resourceful Russian population, every individual must have the possibility of developing freely: free from harassment and arbitrary treatment and under a clear set of rules. This also means that corruption must be stemmed. As I have said repeatedly: more than anything else Russia needs a partnership with its own people on the road to modernisation. How will Russia be able to make the hoped-for switch to high tech and innovation if, as surveys show, all the elites, 70% of the population, and above all 90% of Russian entrepreneurs are still sceptical about the modernisation project. In the political realm too, the existence of competing ideas and visions is essential to the process of reaching the right solutions for the country's future.

In this sense Germany always stands ready to offer its cooperation and it maintains an open and frank dialogue with Russia. The Economist recently declared that the West should be "critical, not hypocritical" where Russia is concerned and I think that this sums up the position exactly: our dealings with Russia should be critical, open and "without wrong notes". One example for me is the dialogue which my parliamentary group has established with Duma colleagues in which we openly discuss questions of values and our understanding of values. From the very beginning Germany and the European Union have conceived their relations with Russia not only as a strategic partnership defined by interests but as a strategic value-oriented partnership.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I hope I have been able, using these examples, to give you an impression of the breadth and depth of German-Russian relations which has led to enemies becoming not only reliable partners but - through the many, many contacts between our civil societies - also friends. The better and more intensive these relations, the better we will be able to fulfill our *shared responsibility* to tackle the challenges I began by outlining.